

Are You Eating Your Way To Prison?

Modern science has recently confirmed what ancient spiritual wisdom taught for millennia: food affects your mood, emotions, thoughts and behaviour.

Dr. Stephen Schoenthaler, associate professor of sociology and coordinator of the Criminal Justice Studies Program at California State University, Stanislaus conducted studies over eight years which involved thousands of juvenile and adult prisoners. Those studies provided scientific evidence that linked food and criminal behaviour.

Dr. Schoenthaler found that improved nutrition reduces tension, depression, anxiety, confusion and fatigue, and increases vigor.

In various studies Dr. Schoenthaler showed positive behavioral results by making food changes reducing refined carbohydrates, sugary desserts, and foods with chemical additives, and increasing whole grains, complex carbohydrates, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

The data from his study showed a dramatic 61% drop in violence and antisocial behaviour after the dietary changes were implemented.

A previous 1986 study indicated that the worst-behaved prison inmates ate self-selected diets containing significantly less vitamins and minerals than the diets of the better-behaved inmates.

The worst offenders consumed large amounts of milk, meat, fat and sugar, and little fruit, vegetables and complex carbohydrates. There were 21 significant differences in nutrient intake. The worst offenders consumed half as much iron daily as the better-behaved population did.

Dr. Schoenthaler next sought to find out what would happen if the worst offenders who were eating nutrient-poor diets, were given vitamin and mineral supplements.

The results were amazing. Twenty out of 40 previously problematic inmates' moods and behaviour improved markedly.

Dr. Schoenthaler said, "Improvement was largely due to an increase of vitamin and mineral content resulting from diet change. These were essentially malnourished individuals until we got rid of the junk food and replaced it with more wholesome food".

"We have now confirmed the nutrient-mood connection. However, a supplement should properly be seen as an insurance policy not as a replacement for good food."

Sugar displaces other foods which would furnish a normal amount of vitamins and minerals,

says Dr. Schoenthaler.

"A diet high in sugar or fat can generate a relative deficiency of needed nutrients, and a marginal malnutrition that could then effect behaviour."

Dr. Schoenthaler says that comprehensive programs he has developed for penal institutions have resulted in a 72 percent decrease in antisocial behaviour among offenders. The program includes nutritional education for both inmates and jailors. Several states are presently considering adopting these programs.

Unfortunately, the usual prison menu consists primarily of carbohydrates and fats which give prisoners the appearance of good health but which are actually detrimental to their health. But studies are now confirming that such diets not only effect physical health, they hinder the efforts of prison treatment personnel to engender improved behaviour. Prisons would benefit from completely revising their menus with a view of how the provided diets affect behaviour and, in the long run, how poor prison diets culminate in increased medical costs for the Department of Corrections.

Since most prisoners' diets were equally detrimental prior to their incarceration, prisoners who get released should assure that they consume foods which facilitate the kinds of law-abiding behaviour which will keep them from recidivating.

A well-known maxim is "You are what you eat." Now we know that you also "think according to what you eat."

A holistic psychological, spiritual, educational and physical improvement system would include not only mental development but dietary refinement also.

The ancient Egyptians knew this. They regarded proper diet, nutrition and physical health practices as the proper worship of the god Geb.